

DISASTERS IN THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE

By EILEEN SPERBER

"I've been to sea hundreds of times before, but there's something eerie about the area between Florida, Puerto Rico and the Bahamas that gives me goose bumps," Jim Thorne, a noted skin diver and oceanographer told FRONT PAGE DISASTERS. "I was on a boat for 14 days recently, sailing through what is popularly known as the Bermuda Triangle, and we didn't see another vessel or another human being in all that time. The ocean is so vast here that it can swallow up an entire ship and no one will ever be the wiser!"

The freighter *Sylvia L. Ossa* was en route from Brazil to Philadelphia when it disappeared on Wednesday, January 12, 1977. The last message radioed to the Coast Guard said that the ship was experiencing gale force winds and was being forced to reduce speed. Nothing further was heard from the ship and its crew. It was presumed that all hands on board had gone down with their ship. However, when rescuers carefully combed every inch of water in the area where the *Sylvia L. Ossa* is believed to have sunk, they could find no survivors, no wreckage—nothing!

The Bermuda Triangle had claimed 37 more victims. Indeed, in a section of the western Atlantic, off the southeast coast of the United States, more than 100 airplanes and ships

The loss of Flight 19, consisting of five Navy Avenger torpedo planes, is one of the biggest mysteries in the annals of military history.



have literally vanished from the face of the earth and more than 1,000 lives have been lost in this zone of terror, with never a trace of bodies or debris turning up.

Strange? Well, even the U.S. Navy thinks so. To date they admit that quite a number of their vessels have disappeared in what is also known as the Hoodoo Sea, in most instances they remain utterly baffled as to what caused their ships to vanish.

According to one official Navy document, titled "The Loss of Flight 19", at about 2:00 p.m. on the afternoon of December 5, 1945, Flight 19, consisting of five TBM Avenger Torpedo Bombers, departed from the U.S. Naval Air Station, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on an authorized advanced overwater navigational training flight. In charge of the flight was a senior qualified flight instructor, piloting one of the planes. The other planes were piloted by qualified pilots with between 350 and 400 hours flight time, of which at least 55 hours were in TBM type aircraft. The weather over the area covered by the track of the navigational problem consisted of scattered rain showers, with a ceiling of 2500 feet within the showers and unlimited outside the showers, visibility of 6-8 miles in the showers, 10-12 otherwise. Surface winds were 20 knots, with gusts to 31 knots. The sea was moderate to rough, but the general weather conditions were considered average for training flights of this nature.

Nothing should have gone wrong—but it did!

A radio message intercepted at about 4:00 P.M. was the first indication that something was amiss with Flight 19. This message, believed to be between the flight leader and another pilot in the same squadron, indicated that the planes were lost, and that they were experiencing malfunction of their compasses. Attempts to establish communications and to reach the troubled flight were in vain. All radio contact was lost before the exact nature of the trouble or the location of the flight could be determined.

Minutes before vanishing into eternity, the flight leader, Charles Taylor, alerted the Ft. Lauderdale

Naval Air Station to the fact that something was wrong: "This is an emergency. We seem to be off course. We cannot see land... Repeat... We cannot see land... We are not sure of our position. We cannot be sure just where we are... We seem to be lost... We don't know which way is west. Everything is wrong... Strange, we can't be sure of any direction—even the ocean doesn't look as it should."

Then...silence! Flight 19 was never to be heard from again, and no trace of the planes were ever found. The Navy assumed that they crashed at sea, possibly after running out of gas.

Dispatching all available facilities to the immediate area, the Navy called for a sweep of the ocean east of the Florida peninsula. Their search efforts were in vain. No trace of the aircraft was turned up, even though an extensive rescue operation was called for and put into full effect. Says the Navy, "Sufficient aircraft and surface vessels were utilized to satisfactorily cover those areas in which survivors of Flight 19 could be presumed to be located. These efforts were not successful."

As if to add to the already strange nature of the disappearing planes, a PBM patrol plane which was launched at approximately 7:30 P.M. on Dec. 5 to search for the missing TBM's, never returned to base. "This aircraft," by the Navy's own admission, "was never seen nor heard from after take-off." The only clue to what might have happened to the PBM is a report from an unnamed merchant ship sailing off Ft. Lauderdale, which reportedly observed a "burst of flame, and an apparent explosion". This vessel passed through an oil slick at the time and place which matched the presumed location of the PBM. But, to this date, no trace of the plane or its crew has been confirmed by the U.S. Government.

Indeed, the Navy has lost many ships in the Triangle, and yet other vessels, from freighters to destroyers, have encountered strange forces which caused them untold difficulties, including loss of power.

As far back as 1492, when Christopher Columbus passed through

The sea is so vast in the Bermuda Triangle that entire ships can be gobbled up without a trace. Here, Navy search-and-rescue teams look for downed flier in "zone of terror".



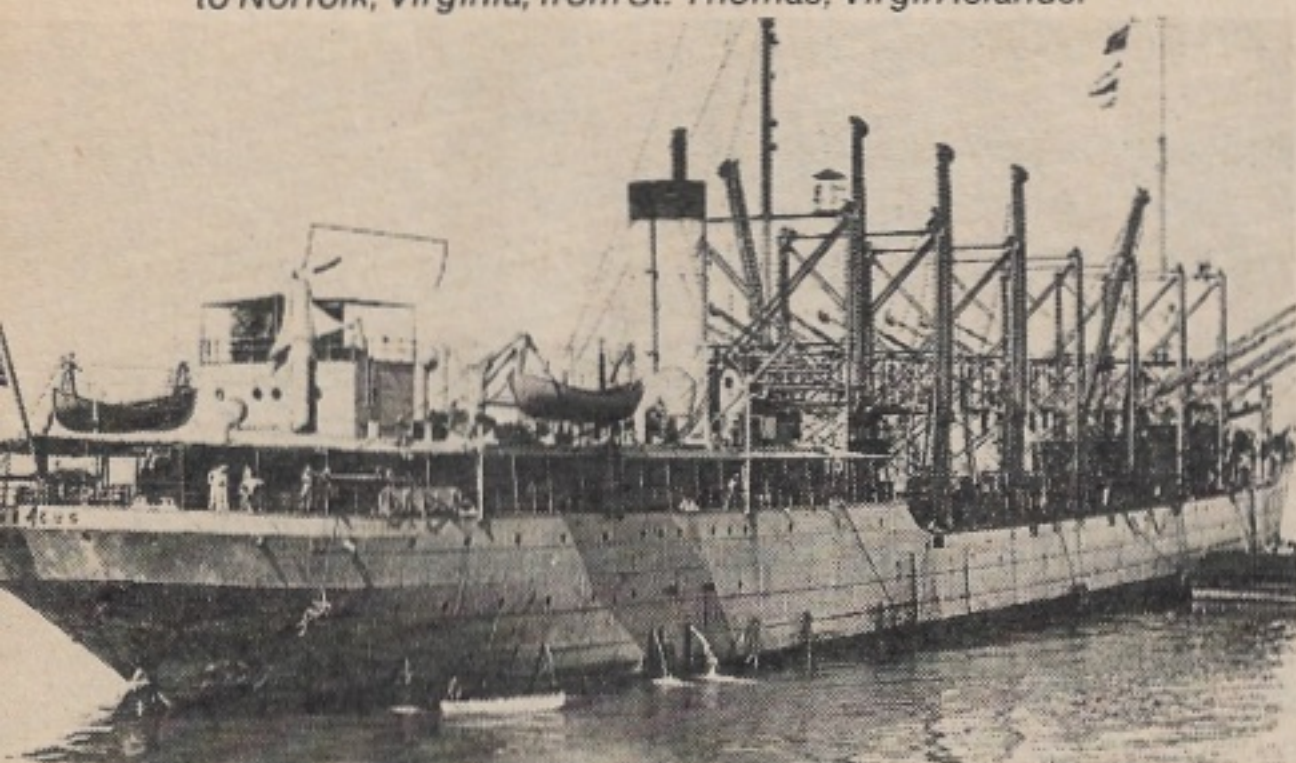
this area on board the Santa Maria, on his way to discovering the New World, odd occurrences have haunted the Triangle. According to Columbus' diary, an eerie globe of fire was seen shooting out of the sky and plunging into the ocean, and the next day the ship's compass began reacting irrationally and the captain had trouble steering a steady course.

On Feb. 16, 1918, the 542-foot fuel ship, the *USS Cyclops* set sail from Rio de Janeiro with a cargo of 10,800 tons of manganese ore. On March 3, she arrived without trouble in Barbados to take on coal before making the final leg of the journey, which would bring her into Baltimore, Md., on March 13. Failing to show up in the East Coast port, an intensive search was made by the Navy. A check with every ship at sea showed that the *Cyclops* had not been seen since the day she left Barbados.

To all intents and purposes, the *Cyclops* had sailed into oblivion and disappeared off the face of the earth.

"The disappearance of this ship has been one of the most baffling mysteries in the annals of the Navy, with all attempts to locate her having proved unsuccessful," a statement issued from the Department of the

USS Nereus disappeared in the Atlantic on its way to Norfolk, Virginia, from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.



BTM patrol plane went looking for Flight 19, never to be seen again. It vanished without even broadcasting a "Mayday". No trace of wreckage was ever found on the water.

Navy in Washington, D.C. confirms, adding that "many theories have been advanced, but none that satisfactorily account for her disappearance."

"There were no enemy submarines in the western Atlantic at the time," an official report continues, "and in December, 1918, every effort was made to obtain information from German sources regarding the disappearance of the vessel. Information was requested from all attaches in Europe, with the result that it is definite that neither German U-boats nor German mines came into the question. The only German information regarding the loss of the *Cyclops* was that emanating from American sources, which stated that the ships left Barbados in March, 1918, and has not been heard of since."

Three-hundred-nine men just vanished at sea as if the ocean had taken one huge breath and gobbled them up! Lt. Cmdr. G.W. Worley, the commanding officer at the time, apparently didn't have the opportunity to lower life rafts nor to send out a distress signal. He vanished along with his crew and the U.S. Consul at Rio de Janeiro, who was being carried as a passenger on board the ill-fated ship.

There are those who maintain that history has a way of repeating itself in threes, and they might just be correct, for it seems far more than mere coincidence that the two sister ships of the *Cyclops* met their doom under a very peculiar set of circumstances.

The *USS Nereus* and the *USS*

Proteus were headed for Norfolk, Va.—that's all we can be absolutely positive about. They had left the Virgin Islands, after taking on cargoes, less than three weeks apart. Then—*Poof!*—they were gone, as if they'd never even existed at all. To this day, the Navy remains totally baffled as to what caused these two giant freighters to disappear in November and December of 1941. No telltale sign of a tragedy was ever uncovered and no SOS was ever broadcast, even though both ships had the most modern of radio equipment on board. Sooner or later, debris is bound to be seen, some sort of wreckage has to float to the top of the water. The fact remains that none did! If the *Nereus* and the *Proteus* aren't in Davy Jones' locker, then where are they?

Even a casual inspection of the *U.S.S. Richard E. Byrd* will tell you why this vessel is the pride and joy of the United States Navy. A sleek, swift-moving guided missile destroyer, its cannons and rockets are ever ready to protect America from any potential foe.

But what course of action do you take when the enemy remains forever invisible, both to the human eye and to radar? It's an important question, for which no one—even in the highest of command—can offer a feasible answer.

"We were en route from Norfolk, Va., to the Bermuda Islands, in March, 1971," Walt Darling Es operations specialist on the *Richard E. Byrd* explains, telling how the ship's voyage through the Triangle

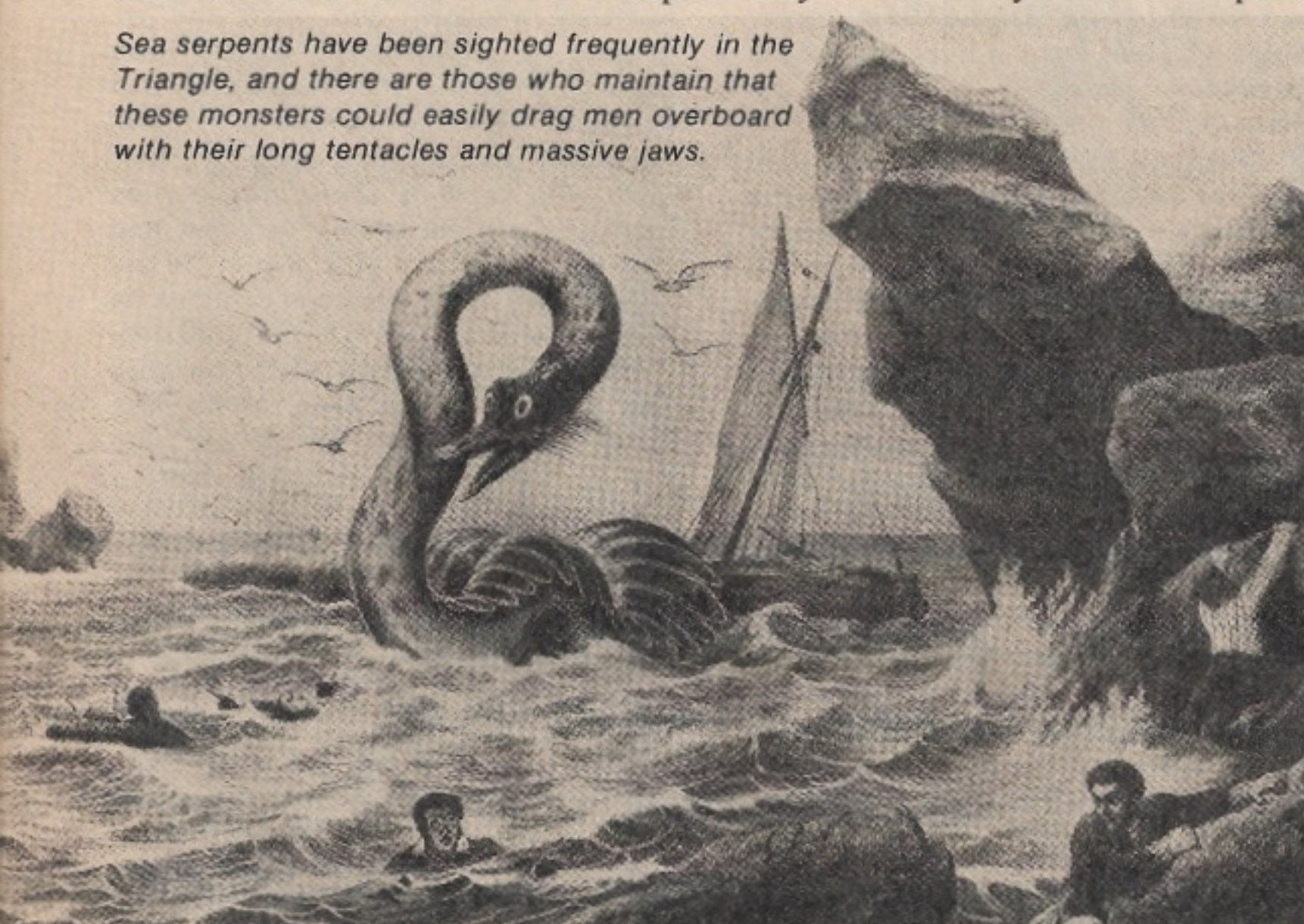
was marred by all sorts of anomalies. "We were out four or five days on a training cruise, preparing to go overseas. As we sailed east, one by one we lost all means of communication. We lost radar first, then air search, surface search, and then land. We had no type of radar contact. Nobody was worried at first. Then the scuttlebutt started that we were entering the Bermuda Triangle. The crew members began to talk about the Triangle and to get worried. Then we lost radio communication, although you can usually get it on the wide bands—the lower frequencies at 1,000 miles, as there are special stations set up at points around the world so that a ship can take, for example, one from France, another from the African Coast, and intersect them and get a fix on where you are. But we could not get anything. The sky was hazy and overcast, so we



Some researchers contend that extraterrestrial UFOs are responsible for kidnapping our ships and planes off the coast of Florida.

could not get a celestial fix either. The electronic gyros went out. We had 300 men on board, many of the crew were afraid we were going around in circles and would never get to our destination. Some said now we would find out personally where all those ships and planes had disappeared to. The men got very nervous, but there was no official statement at the time about what was happening. Then, after nine or ten days, we suddenly got radio contact with Bermuda and came in. The trip

Sea serpents have been sighted frequently in the Triangle, and there are those who maintain that these monsters could easily drag men overboard with their long tentacles and massive jaws.



usually takes four to five days. We never found out what was the matter."

A hair-raising story, indeed—and a true one! This was not the only time, according to Navy records, that one of their destroyers had experienced "unusual difficulties" while sailing through the Triangle on maneuvers.

Just like the *Richard E. Byrd* before her, the *U.S.S. Vogelgesang* had a nerve-wracking encounter with the forces of the unknown, which threatened to take her out of commission for ever!

According to best-selling author Charles Berlitz, writing in *Without a Trace* (Doubleday), "the *Vogelgesang* was on a return cruise from Puerto Rico to the United States in March, 1974, when it underwent an unexpected course modification. It stopped at sea overnight and part of one day, with all electric and

mechanical systems non-functional, and no power from the boilers. The crew was never told what was wrong; scuttlebutt implied that nobody knew anyway, an observation familiar to service and ex-service personnel. During the night, although the weather was calm, the *Vogelgesang* suffered, according to the crew, strains and stresses almost as if it were being torn apart."

Still other ships may not have been as lucky as the *Vogelgesang* and may have actually been "torn apart"

by the powers that be in this section of the Atlantic.

In May, 1968, the U.S. submarine *Scorpion* disappeared without a word being uttered. There was an exhaustive search made in the area where it was believed to have sunk, by aircraft and surface vessels, but nothing ever turned up. However, a crewman on the Navy refrigerator ship *Hyades* did sight a strange "orange object" some 1400 miles east of Norfolk.

For years armchair theorists have speculated that alien beings traveling via UFO, or flying saucer, have been entering the earth's atmosphere in this area and taking back specimens to their home planet. They point to the fact that formations of strange pulsating lights have been seen in the sky over the Triangle for hundreds of years, and that on numerous occasions mysterious objects have been observed either

splashing into or emerging from the ocean.

Although he tends to believe that a sizeable percentage of the disappearances inside the Bermuda Triangle can be explained "by a series of violent natural phenomena", oceanographer, explorer, and author Jim Thorne, credited with discoveries of the oldest marine archaeological find in history off the Greek Island of Melos, does admit to having had not one, but four UFO sightings while recently sailing off the coast of Florida. "One such observation was made by seven people for a period of approximately three minutes," he says. "I am not saying they were vehicles from outer space, but I do state unequivocally that what we saw were unidentified flying objects capable of great speeds and maneuverability!"

And while there have been any number of peculiar oddities seen in the Triangle, there are other "way out" theories for the disappearances of ships, planes and crews besides UFO kidnappings. Another possibility, several researchers contend, is that the various craft somehow—through some unknown means—entered a "time warp", and are now caught in another dimension, a sort of "limbo of the lost", as author John Spencer likes to phrase it. Also, giant marine life—sea serpents to be more specific—have been seen repeatedly near ships and even submarines. These "monsters of the deep" could easily use their long tentacles or massive jaws to drag men overboard and to their death.

Whatever explanation you choose to accept—natural or supernatural—there is no denying the fact that strange phenomena run rampant inside the Hoodoo Sea. Columbus got a glimpse of some unidentifiable force which has wreaked havoc on our airplanes and ships ever since. Not only has the U.S. Navy had to deal with the situation, but not one from cabin cruiser to sailboat owner is immune. All that we know for sure is that over 1,000 lives have been given up, either to the sea or to something *far beyond*. We can only wait and see who the next victim will be in the deadly zone of terror that is known as The Bermuda Triangle. ■